

THE INFLUENCE OF LITERACY CAMPAIGNS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF  
CUBA AND NICARAGUA

By

AMELIA JEANETTE LIZARRAGA

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Dr. David Pietz

## **Abstract**

This thesis will consider the historical impacts, methodology, and effects of literacy campaigns in both Post-Revolution Cuba and Nicaragua. Literacy will be examined through the lens of its necessity in educational human rights, and these campaigns will be applied to modern issues in sustainable development. Political implications of radical social form in the context of literacy will be examined to understand the purpose behind education following revolution. Most critically, this work will bring to light the great deal of influence the Cuban National Literacy campaign had on Nicaragua's literacy crusade. In general, this thesis supports the idea that Cuba's literacy campaign was overall more successful in its literacy achievements even presently because of their continued educational influence in other parts of their world and the minimal foreign influence they have experienced.

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## Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations developed a list of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals to be globally achieved by 2030. The fourth goal, *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning*, lists “By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy” as one of its targets.<sup>1</sup> This objective underscores the necessity of global literacy in comprehensively meeting quality education needs. Yet, as institutions continue to call for an end to illiteracy on a global scale, some common issues continue to be a hinderance for the success of such a large endeavor.

Adebisi cites continuous insurgency and insecurity as the primary reasons why global literacy has yet to be achieved.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly evident in an analysis of pre-campaign Cuba and Nicaragua, which both underwent extreme periods of instability coupled with a lack of comprehensive national education. Furthermore, their success in achieving literacy following their respective periods of insurgency also serves as a blueprint for other nations struggling with illiteracy in modern times. Some successful literacy projects, especially the two that will be discussed in this thesis can be utilized as a model for the modern problems with achieving global literacy, which establishes this work as relevant to such an ambitious global goal.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Sustainable Development, “Goal 4: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform,” (*United Nations*, 2015), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>.

<sup>2</sup> Adebisi, T.A. "Insurgency and Insecurity: Bane of Global Literacy Development." (*Bulgarian Journal of Science and Education Policy* 10, no. 1, 2016), 54.

Cuba's literacy campaign was one of the most ambitious to date, both in its goals and successes which will be elaborated on in the subsequent section. In fact, its success led to a substantial influence over other literacy projects, and notably, Nicaragua's. While both Nicaragua and Cuba's literacy campaigns provided an unprecedented level of education to their respective states, Cuba's literacy campaign was overall more successful in its literacy achievements even presently because of their continued educational influence in other parts of their world and the minimal foreign influence they have experienced.

First, this paper will discuss a historical overview of both Cuba and Nicaragua. This includes the key influences that led to their respective projects and why they produced the results they accomplished. This will also lay the foundation concerning how Cuba's literacy project led to similar success in Nicaragua and will provide much of the needed context for why Cuba's literacy campaign was overall more influential. Additionally, the overview will characterize the significance of each campaign, especially regarding the size and scope of each campaign and the achievements of both. Finally, the historical portion will examine the state of literacy and education in both nations prior to their literacy projects.

The subsequent portion will examine the details of both literacy projects. This will include the timelines of both, a continued discussion of their influences, as well as the guiding powers that determined what decisions both countries made. This will also incorporate the strategies of each campaign and which demographics were common among literacy instructors. This portion will additionally assess the factor of geographic space in how literacy was taught, and how this also impacts transitions in class structures.

Next, a more comprehensive analysis of the political reasons behind each literacy project is considered. This points to the twentieth-century revolutions both states underwent under the regimes of Castro and Sandinista as well as the timelines of both leaders. These political reasons will also lead to a discussion of the benefits of educational reform on nationalism.

Finally, the legacy of literacy campaigns in both nations will be highlighted. This portion of the thesis will investigate how literacy currently affects modern education, and the present literacy rates of these countries. The legacies of these literacy projects are critical to understanding the relevance of this work to modern education needs and to establishing the overall greater success that Cuba achieved.

The combined analysis of the historical synopsis, campaign descriptions, political reasoning, and modern-day legacies are fundamental to the argument of this thesis. By discussing all of the major elements of the literacy projects in Cuba and Nicaragua, it will become evident that not only was Cuba's literacy campaign more successful, it was instrumental in laying the framework for Nicaragua's more than twenty years later, among dozens of other countries with similar successes.

## **Part One: History-Cuba**

### *Key Influences*

Cuba experienced massive governmental change in 1959 that heavily influenced the nation's decision to attempt countrywide literacy. While the exhaustive list of political reasons behind the literacy campaign of 1961 are both elaborate and nuanced, (therefore requiring the need for its own section later), it is important to establish some of the historical influences at this point to demonstrate the significance and intention behind such an endeavor.

The Cuban revolution was complete by 1959, when former President Batista was ousted of his title and Fidel Castro took over as the new leader of the state.<sup>3</sup> Like most revolutions, a number of ensuing social changes occurred thereafter as a way of re-establishing and differentiating a new government from a past one. Consequently, the new leadership led to numerous social changes over the following decade-notably, the literacy campaign of 1961. The newly appointed minister of Education, Armando Hart Dávalos, began formulation of the literacy campaign beginning in 1959, and it was quickly established that education would be one of the largest objectives of the new government.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Literacy and Education Prior*

Under Batista's dictatorship prior to Castro's revolution, disparities in education were commonplace across the state of Cuba. At that time, fifty-two percent of Cubans had not surpassed a third-grade education level, and only one percent had completed four years of higher education.<sup>5</sup> 1953 was the last time that Cuba had attempted a census before the revolution, which found the nation to have an illiteracy rate of 23.6 percent, with a much higher rate among rural communities.<sup>6</sup> In fact, outside of the province of Havana, provinces like Oriente and Piñar del Rio had illiteracy rates of 35.3 percent and 30.8 percent respectively.<sup>7</sup> In these more rural areas, sixty-four percent of compulsory school aged children were not attending school, and only three percent of those that were attending were passing their compulsory requirements.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Abendroth, Mark, and McLaren, Peter. *Rebel Literacy*. (Duluth: Litwin Books, 2009), 49.

<sup>4</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, *Rebel Literacy*. 50-51.

<sup>5</sup> Torres, Carlos A. "The State, Nonformal Education, and Socialism in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Grenada." (*Comparative Education Review* 35, no. 1, 1991), 113.

<sup>6</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, *Rebel Literacy*. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Torres, "The State, Nonformal Education, and Socialism", 113.

<sup>8</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, *Rebel Literacy*. 51.



This notable disparity in education spanned more than simply a lack of literacy-it was directly correlated to non-urban areas, which lacked many of the resources to provide a quality education for their students. Rural communities lacked both schools and certified teachers, which required the government to prioritize the areas with less resources in order to meet their goals. The mere scope of the challenges the Cuban government faced prior to commencing with the project demonstrates what a feat it was to attempt nationwide literacy, with such extensive disparities especially in rural areas.

### *Significance of campaign*

By the beginning of 1961, the first stage of the campaign had begun, through the training of adult amateur teachers and teenaged volunteers.<sup>9</sup> The campaign in its entirety lasted until December 22<sup>nd</sup> of the same year, when the country was declared free of illiteracy.<sup>10</sup> Such ambitious projects are rarely completed in a markedly short period of time, which is one of the first reasons that Cuba's success is differentiated from similar literacy efforts.

Not only is this considered such a large feat by most scholars because of the level of literacy that Cuba was able to accomplish within a single year, but the number of participants involved in the campaign was equally remarkable. The campaign was made possible entirely by the work of volunteers who were inspired by the mission of the nation. Over one million Cubans were mobilized by the campaign as either teachers or students and over 707,000 Cubans learned

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<sup>9</sup> Herman, Rebecca. "An Army of Educators: Gender, Revolution and the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961." (*Gender & History* 24, no. 1, 2012), 97.

<sup>10</sup> Herman, 98.

how to read or write during the course of the 1961 endeavor as a result of the quickly organized volunteers.<sup>11</sup>

Four types of volunteers were involved in the campaign beginning in 1961, from the country's youth to amateur teachers, and even professionals who all contributed to the literacy of the new Cuba. Arguably most notable were the volunteers of the "Conrado Benitez" Brigade. This brigade was composed of the youngest volunteers from ages ten to nineteen who taught in the *campesinos* or countryside.<sup>12</sup> The campesino itself is a significant portion of what made the campaign unique, because of the large difference in socioeconomic backgrounds of those in rural parts of the country. This will be expanded upon in *Part 3: Campaign Overview*.

The participation of volunteers for the literacy campaign alone demonstrates the extent to which individuals supported the project and exuded patriotism for their reborn nation. The country would not have had success in achieving any of their goals if not for the volunteers, many of whom were minors at the time.

## **Part 2: History-Nicaragua**

### *Key Influences*

Like Cuba, political implications played a large part in why the literacy crusade took place. Twenty years after the Cuban Revolution, Nicaragua experienced their own uprising, led by the *Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* or the FSLN who ended the oppressive control of the Somoza family in 1979.<sup>13</sup> The Nicaraguan revolution influenced a number of social projects in

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<sup>11</sup> Fernandes, Sujatha. "Freedom Through a Pencil: The 1961 Literacy Campaign in Cuba." (*NACLA Report on the Americas* 44, no. 5, 2011), 39.

<sup>12</sup> Herman, "An Army of Educators." 97.

<sup>13</sup> Torres, "The State, Nonformal Education, and Socialism", 116.

the subsequent years, and also like Cuba, this meant expanding social benefits to underserved Nicaraguans.

One of the main goals for the project was to increase the reading population to at least 50% in order to improve agriculture and industry.<sup>14</sup> The Sandinista revolution also prioritized educational mobilization as the main approach to accomplish this, leading to their own literacy campaign, which they refer to a crusade. Ignorance was classified as the means for a “second mass insurrection” (after the first being against Somoza) to eradicate illiteracy throughout the nation.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Literacy and Education Prior*

Also similar to Cuba, the Nicaraguan census revealed a number of key figures about literacy prior to the Crusade. This data was critical to estimating goals and accomplishments of the project because prior to the census, there was no reliable data regarding illiteracy in Nicaragua.<sup>16</sup> The numbers that were produced out of the 1980 census were in many ways alarming but gave Nicaragua an opportunity to produce social change following the information. The census found that fifty percent of the population over the age of ten were illiterate.<sup>17</sup> 21% of this group was between the ages of 10-14, and in the rural areas, between seventy-four and eighty percent of ten to fourteen-year-olds were illiterate.<sup>18</sup> This is particularly significant because of how the rural differences enhance education disparities in a way that mirrors Cuba.

#### *Significance of Campaign*

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<sup>14</sup> Deiner, John T. "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade." (*Journal of Reading* 25, no. 2, 1981), 118.

<sup>15</sup> Torres, "The State, Nonformal Education, and Socialism", 117-118

<sup>16</sup> Deiner, "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade", 119.

<sup>17</sup> Deiner, 120.

<sup>18</sup> Deiner, 120.

In many ways, the volunteer work and support by Nicaraguan citizens during the literacy campaign mirrors Cuba's sentiment of patriotism and duty to their nation. There were more than 80,000 *brigadistas* (brigade members or volunteers) involved in bolstering literacy throughout Nicaragua, with over 50,000 of these being youth brigade members.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the participation of volunteers, which were made up of youth, adults and teachers, the extent to which students were impacted was equally as significant. More than 400,000 adults participated in the campaign as either a teacher as a student, which gave rise to a number of other social programs related to education as a result.<sup>20</sup> The wealth of volunteers that were willing to organize to help their fellow citizens learn to read and write demonstrates the pride and sense of duty Nicaraguans felt and is the primary reason that the crusade was successful.

### **Part 3: Campaign Overview**

#### *Timelines*

As aforementioned, the Cuban literacy campaign began in January of 1961 following the revolution and ended by December of the same year, which was declared as the "Year of Education."<sup>21</sup> This year dedicated to literacy was divided into a few phases to accomplish their goals for the mission. At this point, it is necessary to underscore the significance of volunteers in this project. The campaign was only made possible by the volunteers involved, and because of this, many newfound teachers needed to be trained. The first stage began in the first four months of the year, which included amateur teachers and student primers who were prepped and trained by professional teachers that supervised and organized much of this phase.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Torres, "The State, Nonformal Education, and Socialism", 118.

<sup>20</sup> Torres, "The State, Nonformal Education, and Socialism", 118.

<sup>21</sup> Herman, "An Army of Educators," 97.

<sup>22</sup> Herman, 97.

One of the best-known characteristics of the Cuban literacy campaign was their incorporation of youth volunteers in their literacy campaign. This was a hallmark of the second stage, which occurred in April of 1961, when Castro closed schools early to allow for youth involvement in the literacy effort.<sup>23</sup> The demographic data from students who volunteered to teach rural Cubans to read and write is particularly notable and will be elaborated on in a subsequent section. The third stage of the literacy campaign began in August, when over 13,000 factory workers were brought in to assist with the effort, forming the *Patria o Muerte* (Fatherland or Death) worker's brigade.<sup>24</sup> Cuba's volunteers were truly comprehensive in nature, ranging significantly in age, occupation, and experience and are responsible for the success of the state's year-long timeline.

Nicaragua began their literacy campaign on a slightly contrasting timeline from Cuba's. It is necessary to reiterate the year that Nicaragua began their educational transformation to understand the differences between the states' respective timeframes. Nicaragua initiated their literacy crusade in 1980-two decades after the world saw Cuba's success. Preparation began early in the year, with the ambition of having 180,000 literacy teachers trained to mobilize by a starting date of March 24<sup>th</sup>.<sup>25</sup> This training commenced with a two-week intensive course for the first eighty volunteers-including teachers and specialized professionals from a number of adjacent technical vocations, who subsequently trained the next 560 volunteers.<sup>26</sup> This method of training was divergent from Cuba's blueprint, as the model for preparing volunteers in Nicaragua continued in this manner-an exponential number of trainees became the trainers until ultimately

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<sup>23</sup> Herman, 97.

<sup>24</sup> Herman, "An Army of Educators," 98.

<sup>25</sup> Deiner, "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade", 121.

<sup>26</sup> Deiner, 121.

180,000 were equipped. The state was ultimately successful in achieving its March deadline, when the crusade officially commenced.

Following their training programs, the literacy crusade was launched beginning with a rally held in Managua that around 70,000 people attended.<sup>27</sup> This is a stark contrast to Cuba's deployment of volunteers in rural areas at the beginning of their campaign, and is likely due to the to gather more popular support in Nicaragua. Nicaragua began their crusade with an extensive publicity effort that included billboards, documentaries and posters to earn the approval of the Nicaraguan people.<sup>28</sup> The entire crusade concluded by August, where it was estimated that around 150,000 volunteers contributed to the ability of 600,000 Nicaraguans learning to read and write.<sup>29</sup>

Undoubtedly, the successes of each campaign concerning their timelines gives a substantial amount of context regarding both nations' considerable achievements. From training until the end of their campaign, Cuba's project took almost a full year, from January until December. Nicaragua began planning their crusade in January but did not complete the training all of their literacy workers until their planned date in March. Additionally, the instruction of illiterate Nicaraguans took place for only five months. This separates the crusade considerably from Cuba's official campaign start at the beginning of the year immediately following their preparatory period from September to December of 1960.<sup>30</sup>

The shorter timeline of Nicaragua's campaign indicates a few things about the goals and successes of both literacy projects. First, Nicaragua was able to achieve an incredibly successful

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<sup>27</sup> Deiner, 122.

<sup>28</sup> Deiner, 122.

<sup>29</sup> Deiner, 122.

<sup>30</sup> Herman, "An Army of Educators." 97.

level of literacy in the short time that the state spent exclusively dedicated to educating the population. From the initial census taken at the beginning of 1960 that indicated about half of the Nicaraguan population was illiterate, the rate was reduced to thirteen percent by the program's conclusion in August.<sup>31</sup> As previously stated, the entire country of Cuba was declared free of illiteracy by December of 1961. The extensive nature of the Cuban campaign indicates that the reach and level of literacy achieved would be higher than Nicaragua. This is somewhat affirmed in the illiteracy rates found following the campaign. Cuba was left with only 272,000 illiterate citizens, meaning that the illiteracy rate had dropped from 23.6 percent to 3.9 percent in their "Year of Education."<sup>32</sup> Though the level of illiteracy did not decrease as significantly as Nicaragua, Cuba was able to reduce their illiterate population to a much smaller proportion. This also made Cuba the country with highest literacy rate of any Latin American Country at that time.<sup>33</sup>

While Cuba reduced their illiterate population to the lowest in Latin America of its time and declared illiteracy eradicated at a significantly lower level, it is essential to discern the differences between each nation's literate foundation. Cuba began their campaign with a significantly lower level of illiteracy-less than half of that of Nicaragua. Though Nicaragua completed their initial literacy crusade with a remaining thirteen percent of their population still illiterate, they were able to reduce their illiteracy rate by thirty-seven percent compared to Cuba's 19.7 percent difference. Additionally, including Cuba's preparatory period from September to

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<sup>31</sup> Deiner, *The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade*", 122.

<sup>32</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, *Rebel Literacy*. 86.

<sup>33</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, 86-87.

December of 1960, Nicaragua was able to complete their campaign in nearly half of the time that it required Cuba to. This is at least in part due to Cuba's campaign occurring first—a notable feat.

Cuba's influence on Nicaragua's literacy crusade is a critical aspect of this work, especially because it demonstrates how Nicaragua attained success because of support and framework developed by Cubans initially. While this will be more comprehensively examined later, it is necessary to establish that because of Cuba's initial developments, Nicaragua was able to succeed in their literacy crusade under a significantly shorter timeline twenty years later.

### *Historical Influences*

1961 was a critical year in Cuban history and global relations in general. During Cuba's official Year of Education, a number of critical changes and events occurred. Most noteworthy among these include the United States breaking diplomatic relations with Cuba, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and Castro declaring the reborn country as Socialist.<sup>34</sup> The campaign related directly to these global changes as a way to redefine itself under new governmental control and develop a message about the nation's intention to succeed, regardless of foreign influence.

In Nicaragua, after a significant political change was implemented in 1980, the *Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización* or National Literacy Crusade was one of the first steps toward bringing social change to marginalized communities in the state. Moreover, comprehensive literacy and education was virtually non-existent in pre-revolutionary Nicaragua.<sup>35</sup> Before the need to establish education in the state was announced, it had not been considered a priority for

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<sup>34</sup> Herman, "An Army of Educators." 97.

<sup>35</sup> Hanemann, Ulrike. "Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign." (*Paper Commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life, 2005*), 2.



the previous government. This meant that the literacy crusade was a particularly ambitious goal for the Sandinista government because it was the first real attempt to develop education reform. It is noted by some experts that under Somocism (named after the Somoza government), literacy was not a priority because it would have empowered individuals to fight for democratic participation.<sup>36</sup>

Much of the historical influence on the two campaigns also came from a place of needing imminent social change. Because both states were undergoing a massive revolution immediately before declaring the start of their literacy processes, the overturn of governments resistance to foreign influence heavily impacted the reasoning behind the educating their populations. Because Cuba underwent revolution and radical social reform twenty years prior to Nicaragua, it set a precedent for what social transformations a new government could undertake and the model for a successful literacy campaign was born. Since the change in government and revolution is so deeply embedded into the historical influences of the campaigns, there can be no complete distinction from the political implications of either campaign, which will be further discussed in *Part 4: Political Reasons*.

### *Strategies*

With such an extensive effort that went into both literacy projects, a number of logistics had to be in place to actualize either governments' plans. Undoubtedly, there are a number of considerations that much be put into place prior to mobilizing volunteers, such as curriculum, housing, food, and healthcare. As expected, governments undertook a large challenge when financing this extensive of a project.

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<sup>36</sup> Hanemann, 2.

In Nicaragua, it is estimated that the equivalent of twenty-one million U.S. dollars was the cost of the Literacy Crusade.<sup>37</sup> Regardless of the cost, it was important to the new government to actualize their promise to their citizens. In order to fundraise for the project, a Nicaraguan committee appealed to global organizations for financing, including governments, organizations, and unions. Some examples of international aid contributed by these categories of institutions include material gifts from religious and solidarity groups who donated school supplies.<sup>38</sup>

Estimates of Cuba's campaign cost are around twenty million pesos, but this estimate does not consider participants' contributions and solidarity organizations that greatly subsidized the government's costs and made the success of the campaign feasible.<sup>39</sup> In addition, *brigadistas* largely took care of their own needs through work in agricultural cooperatives during the day.<sup>40</sup> Volunteers' and nonvolunteering citizens' willingness to contribute to the financial possibility of the National Literacy Campaign demonstrates the extent to which Cubans committed to helping one another and developed a heightened sense of camaraderie.

In works related to either literacy project, one word commonly used is "participative," which is particularly fitting because of the nature of such a task. Truly, without the participation of both teachers and students, massive social revolution in this form would not be possible. As highlighted previously, volunteers that participated in either campaign are one of the most notable and vital factors to the success of this type of project.

In Cuba, this sense of duty to the country from an inspiration led by Castro, who emphasized that everyone should go out and help others. The motto of the National Literacy

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<sup>37</sup> Deiner, "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade", 121.

<sup>38</sup> Deiner, 122

<sup>39</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, *Rebel Literacy*, 74.

<sup>40</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, 74.

Campaign was “the one who knows teaches the one who doesn’t.”<sup>41</sup> This sentiment mobilized a large base of volunteers from a number of backgrounds and demographics to donate their time to the cause. Because of this push for volunteerism, the demographics of these volunteers is also particularly noteworthy.

In many ways, the Cuban Literacy campaign engaged young people like it never had before. At the time of the campaign, 1.25 million of the seven million Cubans participated either as a teacher or a student, and with respect to the two million Cubans who were too young to participate, this meant that one in four eligible Cubans participated in the project.<sup>42</sup> Many young volunteers were the first in their family to leave home for an extended period of time, making it a significant transition and a learning opportunity about the regional differences and disparities in education and similar infrastructure.

Beyond breaking the barriers of engaging youth, Cuba’s literacy campaign empowered women both through their education and their engagement as volunteers. More than 54,000 of the 100,000 young volunteers who supported the literacy effort were female, and among all teachers, 59% of literacy teachers were women.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, fifty-five percent of people who became literate during the year of education were women, giving them a significant number of new opportunities through literacy and education.<sup>44</sup> The considerable number of young women who volunteered to teach often meant considerable opposition from families, as it was a rarity for

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<sup>41</sup> Martín Sabina, Elvira. "Thoughts on Cuban Education," trans. Mariana Ortega Breña, (*Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 2, 2009), 135.

<sup>42</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, *Rebel Literacy*, 87.

<sup>43</sup> McCall, Cecelia. "Women and Literacy: The Cuban Experience." (*Journal of Reading* 30, no. 4, 1987), 320.

<sup>44</sup> Herman, "An Army of Educators." 98.

children, especially female, to be away from home at all.<sup>45</sup> The National Literacy Campaign was one of the first opportunities for women in Cuba to have agency over such significant contributions to a national effort.

Nicaragua prioritized similar demographics because of their place in the radical social change they planned to achieve. Their National Human Development Plan identified key actors in the transformation of their country under Sandinista as women, children, and young adults.<sup>46</sup> By educating and empowering these groups in particular, Nicaragua could expand their social reform. Beyond this, women were responsible for much of the success that Nicaragua saw during its crusade. Women made up a large majority of volunteer educators, were more at risk of attacks by counterrevolutionaries and prevailed regardless.<sup>47</sup> On both sides of the crusade, this was the opportunity for many women to “wake up their minds” for the first time as they were empowered through this new process.

The prioritization and empowerment of women in both literacy campaigns is a common thread among education initiatives beginning in this timeframe. For many women, this was the first opportunity they had at a greater education, which leads to a number of subsequent opportunities. In general, women benefit most from education efforts such as both of the aforementioned literacy projects, as they are disproportionately illiterate and less likely to be able to become literate because the burden of the work they must continue.<sup>48</sup> This is an example of

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<sup>45</sup> Mujica, René J. "Some Recollections of My Experiences in the Cuban Literacy Campaign." (*Journal of Reading* 25, no. 3, 1981), 222.

<sup>46</sup> Muhr, Thomas. "Optimism Reborn. Nicaragua's Participative Education Revolution, the Citizen Power Development Model and the Construction of '21st Century Socialism'." (*Globalisation, Societies and Education* 11, no. 2, 2013), 284.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel, Patricia. "Mujer! Women, the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade and beyond." (*Equal Opportunities International* 19, no. 2/3/4, 2000), 18.

<sup>48</sup> McCall, "Women and Literacy", 318.

how twentieth-century literacy framework is still applicable today, as these disparities among women remain.

Cuba's initial support of women in this nation building project set the stage for other campaigns to do the same. By proving the work of female *brigadistas* in the campaign successful (and likely impossible without them), the government was able to demonstrate why women are critical to literacy projects and furthered their implementation in other states, including Nicaragua.

### *Geographic Space*

Scholars have designated literacy campaigns as “an intervention of ‘the city’ in ‘the country’” because of the large educational disparities between individuals living in more rural areas.<sup>49</sup> Like most socio-political issues, literacy is often not reached in rural communities as efficiently as more densely populated areas, especially in the context of a time before technological communication as we know it today. One of the primary goals of both literacy campaigns was to bridge the gap between urban and rural citizens through education and shared experiences.

Nicaragua certainly noted the difference between the education that was needed in rural areas and the needs of more urban locations. Because of this and the results of their aforementioned census, the country was divided into two zones with separate supporting organizations. Urban zones were primarily organized by the Sandinista Defense Committee while Rural Zones received more support from the *Ministry of Agricultural Development*, *Sandinista Youth of July 19*, *National Association of Nicaraguan Teachers*, and the *Ministry of*

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<sup>49</sup> Langley, Sandra. "Revisiting 'Resistance', 'The Peasantry' and Liberation/Development." (*Social Analysis* 48, no. 1, 2004), 187.

*Education*.<sup>50</sup> Based on the more extensive list of organizations supporting rural literacy, these areas needed more educational aid and were the primary target of the project.

Furthermore, Nicaragua saw the integration of the country and city as a way of uniting the country after the new government had established itself. Providing aid to previously overlooked groups in rural areas served Nicaragua's political goals by making a positive impression on communities of varying demographics. By incorporating both rural and urban families as well as individuals of varying class statuses, Nicaragua hoped to establish a favorable precedent over the people. This inclusionary strategy enabled the government to mobilize its people to a different model and vision of a society.<sup>51</sup>

In Cuba, many urban citizens were assigned to rural areas to spread literacy to the areas with the most educational disparity. These rural communities are known as *campesinos*, and many *brigadistas* claim that in their time volunteering, instructors learned as much from those they taught through the exchange of life experiences. Castro himself noted "that the people of Cuba had to realize that they owed a debt to the illiterates of the country and that they had to sacrifice in order to pay it."<sup>52</sup> For many youth volunteers, this was their first experience with people outside of their own class, social circle, and geographic space, which gave them a unique perspective in understanding the lives of others.

The overlap between rural areas and lack of education cannot be overlooked. The illiteracy that disproportionately impacted *campesinos* is directly due to the economic struggle these rural regions faced pre-revolution. Much of the infrastructure had to be built for instructors

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<sup>50</sup> Deiner, "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade", 121.

<sup>51</sup> Arnove, Robert F, and Graff, Harvey J. *National Literacy Campaigns : Historical and Comparative Perspectives*. (New York, N.Y.: Plenum Press, 1987), 270.

<sup>52</sup> Prieto, Abel. "Cuba's National Literacy Campaign." (*Journal of Reading* 25, no. 3, 1981), 216.

to make it to these areas, including bridges, roads, and trails.<sup>53</sup> With the lack of infrastructure prior to the construction for these literacy efforts, the link between poverty and lack of education is undeniable. One young Cuban volunteer noted: “I came to understand that my situation there was not as rough as it could have been, compared to the conditions that, generally speaking, existed in the countryside.”<sup>54</sup>

Integration of the countryside and city was inherently a political goal, as extending basic social services to neglected communities incorporated them into national endeavors and gave them a sense of nationalism under the new government. Along with the newly instilled governmental support that was a goal for these campaigns, empowering marginalized communities through education was the first step in ending class division. While political themes will be examined in a larger sense later, it is important to note that integrating rural communities in literacy project served the government in addition to the people. Additionally, by mobilizing urban youth from better economic circumstances, volunteers became more appreciative of their rural counterparts and energized young people’s dedication to literacy and social access in general in the countryside.<sup>55</sup>

### *Cuba’s Influence*

It is particularly well established that Nicaragua has long had what is known as a “special relationship” with Cuba, meaning that Cuba had long supported military, healthcare, and educational goals of the Nicaraguan government. This relationship certainly extends into their respective literacy campaigns, as the framework and support Cuba provided to Nicaragua made

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<sup>53</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, *Rebel Literacy*, 74.

<sup>54</sup> Mujica, “Some Recollections,” 223

<sup>55</sup> Arnove and Graff, *National Literacy Campaigns*, 25.

the literacy crusade possible. Because of the success that Cuba experienced twenty years earlier, it best positioned them to assist in other literacy efforts and it also served them politically to do so. Cuba's support in Nicaragua's campaign and revolution overall bolstered the foreign policy-related goals that it planned to achieve following their own transfer of power. After 1968, Cuban foreign policy transitioned from a strategy of guerrilla warfare to a more diplomatic approach, including aid in the social goals Nicaragua planned to achieve.<sup>56</sup>

One concrete way that Cuba was directly responsible for Nicaragua's literacy success was through their first formal cooperation. Known as the "Mixed Commission for Scientific, Economic, and Technological Cooperation", Nicaraguan officials were able to convey their needs to the much more established Cuban government, which sought to fulfill many of these needs through grants and loans.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Cuba's educational support in Nicaragua started prior to the literacy campaign's commencement with deployment of their own teachers. Initially, Cuba provided over 2,000 teachers to Nicaragua on a rotating basis and trained over 3,000 Nicaraguan teachers in Cuba using their teaching methodologies.<sup>58</sup> When the literacy crusade in Nicaragua formally began, this educational support from Cuba carried on to a larger extent. Nicaraguan *brigadistas* and voluntary support from Spain, Costa Rica, and Peru was enhanced through Cuba's provision of over 1,200 teachers, some of which who had already been aiding in rural school systems.<sup>59</sup> Beyond tangible aid, Cuba's assistance included technical assistance and advice based on the findings and achievements of their own campaign.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Prevost, Gary. "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?" (*Latin American Perspectives* 17, no. 3, 1990), 123.

<sup>57</sup> Prevost, "Cuba and Nicaragua", 126.

<sup>58</sup> Prevost, 126.

<sup>59</sup> Deiner, "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade", 121.

<sup>60</sup> Prevost, "Cuba and Nicaragua", 126.



Nicaragua's literacy campaign would not have been as successful without the framework built by Cuba through years of research and model development. In fact, Cuba's literacy campaign was critical in developing curriculum and a foundation for a large number of other developing nations, which is what sets it apart from other projects in a number of ways. This relates directly to the more prominent legacy that Cuba has established regarding education. Nicaragua is also quick to acknowledge the support it received from the Cuban government and how this allowed them to see such successful results. In 2009, Nicaragua's Education Minister formally made this known when he dedicated their literacy campaign to Fidel Castro, stating that it "also pays homage to the Cuban people, its government, to Fidel and to its President Raul Castro."<sup>61</sup> Nicaragua's government acknowledging Cuba's critical groundwork in literacy as a reason for their own progress is one of the most compelling reasons that the initial campaign was more successful.

#### **Part 4: Political Strategy**

Scholars have produced a great deal of discourse regarding the educational component of literacy campaigns' potential overemphasis. This potential overstatement of education is possible because of the political motives, influences, and effects of the projects left a greater legacy. Torres notes that "the nature of educational change in Latin America is related to the nature of the state, more so in revolutionary societies such as Cuba [and] Nicaragua."<sup>62</sup> Because of the revolutionary goals of education as a form of radical social transformation, teaching a national

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<sup>61</sup> "Nicaragua's Education Minister Dedicates Literacy Campaign to Fidel Castro." (*IPR Strategic Business Information Database*, 2009.)

<sup>62</sup> Torres, "The State, Nonformal Education, and Socialism", 121.

population to read and write illustrates the political goals of the government more so than a priority of neutral educational outcomes.

Kleinbach argues that literacy projects in general cannot be neutral, but rather are “political activities in support of development and participatory democracy”.<sup>63</sup> This is certainly true in the case of Cuba and the Castro regime, which was able to achieve many of their domestic and foreign political goals through the spread of literacy and the expansion of their curriculum.

Additionally, neither literacy campaigns themselves, nor the content taught in the process is politically neutral, which is the specific design of the project.<sup>64</sup> As the content of the information taught is evaluated, it is apparent that lessons incorporated pro-state agendas. Beyond the literal incorporation of political themes, nonformal education like literacy campaigns advances the social goals of revolution, as educational programs are one way in which drastic social reform can begin in a way that benefits the state’s people.

#### *Political Themes in Cuba*

Cuba certainly used their outreach and diplomatic expansion of their literacy campaigns in other parts of the world. In the first decade following the revolution, it is well established that Cuba dedicated their time and resources to support other revolutionary movements in the region.

<sup>65</sup> The state’s focus on supporting international needs, whether they be educational, health-related, or otherwise is an attempt to promote their own political values while establishing themselves as a collaborator and consultant in a global context.

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<sup>63</sup> Kleinbach, Russell. "Nicaraguan Literacy Campaign: Its Democratic Essence." *Monthly Review*, New York. 1949, 37, no. 3, 1985), 75.

<sup>64</sup> Kleinbach, 75.

<sup>65</sup> Prevost, "Cuba and Nicaragua", 121

Moreover, the literacy campaign was plainly not apolitical. The content in the literacy books distributed for the campaign was intentionally pro-revolution and provided another opportunity to advance the goals of the new government. Some of the content topics in *¡Venceremos!*, the textbook for literacy instruction, included the Revolution's solutions to agriculture, industry, health, and homeownership.<sup>66</sup> In the final lesson of the curriculum, the reading topic relates to internationalism, focusing on the support that foreign forces would give Cuba in order to support the advancement of the revolution. This includes a paragraph stating "People of all nations help us. United we will defeat the aggression. They cannot stop the Revolution. Shouts of liberty come from people of all nations."<sup>67</sup> By furthering revolutionary topics in the content that those being taught would encounter, Cuba provided its population with both the benefit of education and a favorable view of the new government.

#### *Political Themes in Nicaragua*

Post revolution, Nicaraguans encountered individual experiences with political change and questions of inequality were a common theme of the crusade. *Brigadistas* received a firsthand account of the widespread disparities in education that poor Nicaraguans faced and their own communities did not experience. The directors of the crusade welcomed questions of inequality as an opportunity for volunteers to be critical of the pre-revolutionary sentiment.<sup>68</sup> Firsthand accounts of campesino lifestyles were critical to spreading the knowledge of these class disparities, as volunteers and families from the city could see the large gap between wealthy Nicaraguans and those in poverty. In addition, by demonstrating to the volunteers what class

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<sup>66</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, *Rebel Literacy*, 77.

<sup>67</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, 78.

<sup>68</sup> Deiner, "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade", 123.

disparities and poverty looked like in Nicaragua, the crusade can be reframed in the context of painting the Sandinista revolution in a positive light—one that would fight for equality and education for all.

From the start of the Literacy Campaign in Nicaragua, political undertones had been the inspiration for making the nation literate. The founder of the Sandinista Front himself, Carlos Fonesca, shouted “And also teach them to read” at guerrillas who were teaching *campesinos* to assemble and fire guns.<sup>69</sup> The Ministry of Education at the time of the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade said that carrying out a literacy campaign “democratized” their society, arguing that under the Somoza dictatorship, literacy could not be possible without the government contradicting itself.<sup>70</sup> Gorman cites one of the main reasons the revolution’s first year was so successful in Nicaragua was because of the massive literacy campaign, coupled with other concentrated reforms related to agriculture, reappropriating previously privately owned resources, and foreign policy.<sup>71</sup> Nicaragua had every reason to advance their political goals through the education of their people, and they did so while also providing a large benefit to those who were taught.

Content of the Nicaraguan literacy campaign was just as pro-revolution as the precedent that Cuba had established in their work. The literacy text that Nicaragua used was unquestionably pro-Sandinista. Images in the book include banners from the FSLN and quotes such as “The Sandinista Defense Committees defend the revolution.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Bender-Slack, Delane. "Puño En Alto ! The Nicaraguan Literacy Campaign and What It Means for Literacy Today." (*Educational Studies [Ames]* 54, no. 3, 2018), 278.

<sup>70</sup> Arnove and Graff, *National Literacy Campaigns*, 270.

<sup>71</sup> Gorman, Stephen M. "Power and Consolidation in the Nicaraguan Revolution." (*Journal of Latin American Studies* 13, no. 1, 1981), 133.

<sup>72</sup> Deiner, "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade", 123.

Leftist revolutionary movements such as Nicaragua's have been compared to others like Cuba because of the similar importance placed on literacy. This is common among other significant revolutionary states of the time period, including other leftist regimes such as China and the Soviet Union who also used literacy as an opportunity to politically inform their populations.<sup>73</sup>

Beyond the political reasons for either campaign, political pushback from other groups was just as common, creating a large hinderance to the success of the governments' work. Because literacy is an inherently democratizing undertaking, opponents of democratic governments often fight back against the efforts to educate common individuals. In Nicaragua, this largely took shape in conflicts sparked by Somocistas and rebel Sandinistas. At least fifty *brigadistas* were killed by these fringe groups, which prompted the government to deploy armed Sandinistas to protect these volunteers in locations where they were at risk.<sup>74</sup>

In Cuba, the Bay of Pigs invasion happened in April during the same year of the literacy campaign, setting the precedent for counterrevolutionaries intending to prevent the massive social change Castro had envisioned. However, as the failed attack it was, the Bay of Pigs left Cubans with more anti-imperialist sentiment than before, which helped to push the success of the literacy campaign among other nation-building projects.<sup>75</sup> Beyond this, it also pushed the government to be more meticulous in their defense and protection of volunteers. The Committees for Defense of the Revolution put new precautions into place and made intentionally

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<sup>73</sup> Baracco, Luciano. "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade Revisited: The Teaching of Literacy as a Nation-Building Project." (*Bulletin of Latin American Research* 23, no. 3, 2004), 341

<sup>74</sup> Deiner, "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade", 122.

<sup>75</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, *Rebel Literacy*, 77.

collaborative neighborhood spaces so that illiterate neighbors would accept volunteers to help educate them.<sup>76</sup>

Literacy campaigns help emerging governments to set an identity for themselves and a precedent for what a new nation's values should be. This establishment of new norms is something that has been labeled a "political community."<sup>77</sup> As revolutions take hold in places with instability, educational and social prioritization acts as a stabilizer and unites previously distant regions of a country, especially in the context of disparately poor and rural regions. Finally, revolutions are positively accepted by the people when power is consolidated and stability is brought into the state, and literacy is a large way to provide immediate social form and stability directly to the people.

### **Part 5: Legacy**

Modern literacy in the respective nations of Cuba and Nicaragua is reflective of the massive efforts taken by these governments in the twentieth century. Modernly, Cuba boasts one of the highest literacy rates for youth in the world at 99.87%, while Nicaragua's youth literacy rate is ten percent lower (89.65%).<sup>78</sup> The same is true for adult literacy rates of the same time. Cuba again holds an impressive 99.65% literacy rate among adults, while Nicaragua's adult literacy is at a significantly lower 82.29%.<sup>79</sup> The disparity between literate youth and adults in

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<sup>76</sup> Abendroth and McLaren, 81-82.

<sup>77</sup> Baracco, "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade Revisited," 353.

<sup>78</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. "EFA 2000-2015 Youth Literacy Rate." (*UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, 2016.)

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/indicator-efa-youth-literacy-rate.xlsx>, December 12, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. "EFA 2000-2015 Adult Literacy Rate." *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, 2016.

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/indicator-efa-adult-literacy-rate.xlsx>

Nicaragua is particularly noteworthy. This could suggest that modern education is improving, that there is a lower priority of ensuring Nicaraguan adults are literate, or both.

Across the board, Cuba continues to have literacy rates significantly higher than Nicaragua's in a modern setting. This is perhaps the most obvious indicator of a more successful and lasting campaign, aside from their global expansion of education. One reason that many believe Cuba has been able to remain among the most educationally advanced is their unwavering commitment to literacy and greater education initiatives. This is made possible both by the government, who consistently secure funds to advance education initiatives even in economic downturns, and the sense of community instilled in the Cuban people, who continue to participate actively in educational endeavors.<sup>80</sup>

Another reason that Nicaragua's literacy rates do not hold the same level of longevity as modern day Cuba could be because of their reprioritization of defense over social measures. This is certainly evident in the similar health initiatives that Nicaragua also began in the era of revolution. Before the revolution, Nicaragua's health ranked among the lowest in Latin America which was massively improved in the following three years.<sup>81</sup> This drastic improvement was made possible by a direct link from the literacy crusade's community engagement, along with education about health and preventative measures.<sup>82</sup> However, after a contra war and United States economic blockade were initiated by the mid 1980s, the Nicaraguan government was unable to keep up with their initiatives and 300,000 people were left without healthcare.<sup>83</sup> The

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<sup>80</sup> Martín Sabina, "Thoughts on Cuban Education," 135.

<sup>81</sup> Summerfield, Derek. "Nicaragua: Health and Revolution." (*The Lancet [British Edition]* 335, no. 8693, 1990), 845.

<sup>82</sup> Summerfield, 845.

<sup>83</sup> Summerfield, 845.

Nicaraguan government began reprioritizing funds towards political defense rather than the social programs they started earlier in the decade as a means to cope with the political and economic instability. This account of health initiatives can at least in part explain why longevity in literacy did not occur to the extent that it did in Cuba. Regardless, national development hindered by foreign influence is yet another similarity to the struggles of the Cuban government following their revolution. The literacy crusade nevertheless highly effective in achieving its immediate goals for social reform and community participation, irrespective of its struggle to maintain these successes.

Not only did the literacy campaigns bring a significant amount of expedited social change to their respective nations, but they also sparked larger educational movements. As soon as Nicaragua's campaign ended, the government had begun organizing a follow-up adult literacy program to continue the work that the crusade had started, which continued to fuel a demand for literature, poetry, and extended literacy campaigns that continued to connect community members as they had before.<sup>84</sup>

While Cuba's dedication to maintaining literacy after the campaign concluded was consistent, their expansion into international influence is one of the main reasons this effort is distinguished from others of its kind. As alluded to before, Cuba's literacy and education influence and outreach extends far beyond Nicaragua. Not only did the government's extended programs allow for greater diplomatic relations with developing states, but they helped support local initiatives in a similar way. Cuba developed a distinctive view of adult literacy that created a model used by a number of other countries even in present day. This specific ideal that Cuba has

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<sup>84</sup> Bender-Slack, "Puño En Alto !", 277.



in spreading their effective social policies like (but not exclusive to) literacy has been noted as an “internationalist ethic,” and the values that Cuba promotes in their diplomatic work help to develop assistance for others that goes beyond literacy.<sup>85</sup>

Cuba’s model of teaching, known as *Yo Sí Puedo* or “Yes I Can” has been applied to at least twenty-eight countries since their campaign in 1961.<sup>86</sup> The model is very specific in its goals and processes as a prerequisite of its application to other nations. Some of the requirements prior to the start of the education itself include a formal agreement between the Cuban government and the local organizations involved, Cuban advisors living in the host Country, and an official declaration of areas as “free from illiteracy” after an initial study suggests basic classes are passed.<sup>87</sup> Beyond the agreement both parties secure, the method of teaching is just as rigorous. The curriculum for *Yo Sí Puedo* includes seven introductory lessons in stage one, forty-five lessons consisting of reading, writing, and revision in stage two, and the final stage consisting of twelve consolidation and extension lessons, as well as a final assessment.<sup>88</sup>

*Yo Sí Puedo* also took into account the experiences and knowledge that illiterate people did have when teaching them to read and write. The program adopted an alphanumeric approach in which each letter is assigned to a number.<sup>89</sup> The reasoning for adopting a method that some may deem unnecessary is that individuals who are illiterate still tend to have experience with

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<sup>85</sup> Boughton, Bob. "Back to the Future? Timor-Leste, Cuba and the Return of the Mass Literacy Campaign." (*Literacy & Numeracy Studies* 18, no. 2, 2010), 68.

<sup>86</sup> Boughton, Bob, and Durnan, Deborah. "Cuba’s “Yes, I Can” Mass Adult Literacy Campaign Model in Timor-Leste and Aboriginal Australia: A Comparative Study." (*International Review of Education* 60, no. 4, 2014), 563

<sup>87</sup> Boughton and Durnan, 564.

<sup>88</sup> Boughton and Durnan, "Cuba’s “Yes, I Can,” 564.

<sup>89</sup> Boughton and Durnan, 565.

numbers from money and markets.<sup>90</sup> Using this degree of consideration when developing a curriculum to suit the needs of marginalized communities demonstrates a deeper level of commitment to furthering education.

The comprehensive nature of Cuba's *Yo Sí Puedo* program indicates a dedication to global aid and confidence in the program they adapted for other nations. Additionally, mass literacy campaigns are now more commonly viewed as a method of acknowledging underserved communities and providing them with equal opportunities for success. Moreover, expanding on their own literacy by offering services abroad allows the Cuban government to create more positive opinions of the state and creating better diplomatic relations which can aid them in the future.

#### *Relevance Today*

Developing literacy in a modern context can and should be informed through what was established in literacy campaigns of the twentieth century. The fight against illiteracy in modern times is not one only known to “developing” countries. Bender-Slack argues that educational professionals in charge of issues with illiteracy in the United States could be aided with more knowledge of successful campaigns like Nicaragua's.<sup>91</sup> This point is particularly succinct because many Americans have no knowledge of literacy projects or their successes in countries with different political systems in place. If more recognition was given to countries with successful literacy campaigns in places like Nicaragua and Cuba, lessons from their successes and failures could be applied to new areas and literacy could be expanded upon at a much greater rate.

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<sup>90</sup> Boughton and Durnan, 565.

<sup>91</sup> Bender-Slack, "Puño En Alto!", 278

Similarly, the legacy of female empowerment should not be understated, as the Cuban literacy campaign laid the foundation for a number of women's educational programs that are still in practice today. The Cuban Women's Federation still organizes afternoon classes for rural women with children in school, and "Ana Betancourt" schools were developed to help lower class women with domestic skills, which has now expanded to a larger curriculum including vocational training.<sup>92</sup> The priority and effects of educating women in both campaigns is something that should be considered when planning for modern literacy development.

National literacy campaigns can also be viewed as an alternative method for human development.<sup>93</sup> By expanding the success of their own educational tool into other parts of the world, Cuba committed to a greater legacy as a large supporter of educational efforts. Pateman suggests that Cubans become critical global citizens who pushed against the forces of neoliberalism as their literacy efforts expanded.<sup>94</sup> If alternative methods like literacy campaigns are successful in developing infrastructure and social improvements, governments should think critically about how they would like to push forward as stewards of global citizenship and consider all of their opportunities. In addition, framing literacy and education through the lens of human rights is necessary toward accomplishing sustainable development goals.

## **Conclusion**

Cuba set the standard for much of what modern literacy projects look to fulfill today. While it doesn't often see much recognition in American media, from an apolitical standpoint,

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<sup>92</sup> Lorenzetto, Anna, and Neijs, Karel. "The Cuban Literacy Campaign." (*Convergence [Toronto]* 1, no. 3, 1968), 50.

<sup>93</sup> Pateman, John. "Mark Abendroth, Rebel Literacy: Cuba's National Literacy Campaign and Critical Global Citizenship." (*The International Journal of Cuban Studies* 2, no. 1-2, 2010), 174.

<sup>94</sup> Pateman, 177.

Cuba's massive undertaking to rewrite nationwide literacy efforts is unparalleled. If U.S. and Cuban relations suffered less strain, the general American consensus about Cuban educational achievements, like much of the rest of the international community.

Cuba's literacy campaign was more successful than Nicaragua because of three main factors: their timeline, influence, and sustaining levels of literacy. As continually emphasized, Cuba is uniquely situated as a more successful literacy campaign because it was the first to use its methods, timeframe, and revolutionary influences to make such an intense nationwide change. As it was first to accomplish a feat using this particular model, Cuban literacy will continue to receive more recognition for their work because it laid the framework out for Nicaragua and twenty-eight other campaigns like it to-date.

Additionally, though it took slightly longer to accomplish, Cuba built the foundation for literacy campaigns of the future, including Nicaragua, which give them somewhat of a "social reform head-start" in terms of eradicating illiteracy. Considering their longer timeframe, Cuba was able to reduce their illiteracy rate to under four percent during their Year of Literacy, compared to Nicaragua's thirteen percent. While both campaigns were incredible feats, the barriers in development that Cuba had to tackle coupled with a more successful outcome point only to it being supreme in educational reform.

The level of influence that Cuba continues to hold in the world of literacy also suggests its superior nature. By not only holding their own successful campaign in 1961 but expanding their curriculum to be used in at least twenty-eight other countries, Cuba paved the way for literacy success. The *Yo Sí Puedo* method is revered for its global success, which has been acknowledged by a number of non-governmental organizations. Additionally, Nicaragua itself

acknowledges the success it had originating from the original framework that Cuba established. The government even dedicated their entire crusade to the Cuban government and the Castros, demonstrating the undoubtable influence Cuba had in Nicaragua.

Cuba's sustaining levels of literacy are probably the best evidence of its overall more successful track record in regard to the campaign. Because in modern times Cuba adults and youth remain more literate, evidence is established that the literacy campaign provided longevity to the position of literacy and education in the state.

Beyond the nature of what strategies and emphases led to a better literacy campaign, the concept of mobilizing thousands of volunteers to provide free reading and writing skills to marginalized citizens is a significant achievement, and one that is often understated. Literacy is a backbone of human rights and an institution that democratizes and empowers people to reach their full potential. Additionally, it leads to better health, longer life, and a greater sense of camaraderie among a state's population.<sup>95</sup> An entire country uniting and dedicating a year to providing education to those who need it sounds impossible, but in the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua, we have an incredible level of proof to what can be achieved through revolution, community organization, and seeing one another as a neighbor.

Underdeveloped countries' capability of achieving success in sustainable development is often overlooked, despite the astonishing strides they have made compared to areas typically thought of as developed. With constant discussion about fixing global issues, it is necessary to view successful operations in both past and present or how they can be applied to modern times.

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<sup>95</sup> Campano, Gerald, et al., "Education without Boundaries": Literacy Pedagogies and Human Rights." *Language Arts* 94, no. 1 (2016): 43.

Education literacy campaigns in particular should be celebrated for the massive undertaking that they are, and we can take many lessons away from the work of these twentieth century efforts and the model Cuba has successful expanded.

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